

A Cognominal Profile of Gozo: Past and Present¹

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Abstract

The aim of this article is twofold. First of all, it seeks to shed light on ‘Gozitan surnames’ from a historical point of view, concentrating mainly on the Medieval and the Early Modern Periods. It then seeks to deliver a concise overview of Gozo’s current onomastic scenario. It attempts to address a number of questions, such as: Which are the oldest ‘Gozitan surnames’? Why have many medieval surnames disappeared from the present onomasticon? In what way did the cognominal pool change after the debacle of 1551? Is the present Gozitan onomasticon that different from the Maltese one? Which are the commonest surnames in modern-day Gozo? Do Gozitan localities exhibit any idiosyncrasies within their cognominal repertoire? Which are the main sources available to contemporary family historians and surname researchers?

Some Gozitan Surnames from Medieval and Early Modern Times

In France, Italy and England surnames (as we know them today) were introduced by the Normans; however, there are no discernible vestiges of ‘Maltese’ family names which date back to Norman and Swabian times (1091–1194 and 1194–1266 respectively). Probably, the oldest surnames documented in Malta are **Cafario**, **Grech**, **Calleja**, **Falzon**, and **Attard**, which go back to Angevin times (1266–1283). But documentation covering Gozitan affairs is decidedly meagre and there are hardly any traces of ‘Gozitan surnames’ dating back to this period. The depopulation of Gozo in 1274 at the hands of the Genoese in retaliation for Angevin reprisals is surely an indication of the island’s demographic desolation. A short inventory of names and surnames survives in a Gozitan manuscript of 1299 and clearly includes the family name **Attard**. The same document also reveals the surname

Pousalè, which might be an early rendering of the surname *Busayle* – i.e. **Psaila** (Wettinger, 1999). In any case, these are the two oldest family names I have managed to trace in Gozo so far.



Attard, Calleja and Falzon are three of the oldest family names recorded in Gozo, dating back to the 13th century. Their respective coat-of-arms are, however, 19th-century concoctions.

In point of fact, surnames in Gozo begin to appear quite regularly during the Aragonese period (1283–1410). By way of an example, Pietro de Trapano was a notary public in Gozo in 1351 (Dalli, 2002, p. 104). Aimuccio Catalano was a landowner in Gozo, c. 1364. Jacobinus de Sacco and Frankinus Caffarius (Cafor), were both *cabelloti* (tax-collectors) in 1374 Gozo (Fiorini, 1999, p. 96). In 1390 the Moorish ruler of Tunis conducted a raid upon Gozo and among the captives taken were six *Machulaff* (presumably modern-day **Micallef**) (see Aquilina, 1988, p. 186). The **Navarra** family is certainly of Spanish origin; locally, the surname is actually first recorded in Gozo in the 14th century – e.g. Andreas de Navarra, 1398 (see Fiorini, 1999, p. 237). Other surnames date back to the Castilian epoch (1410–1530): Angelo de Manuelli was a notary public in 1439, whereas Nicolao Achme was a surgeon in 1451. Matheus Bacbac and Petrus de Lucia were Gozitan traders in 1481. Giovanni Castelletta (a.k.a. Johannes Castellicta),

¹ Apart from some slight adjustments, this paper is a transcript of a public lecture delivered by Prof. Mario Cassar at the Gozo Citadel on 17 November, 2023. The event was organised by *Wirt Ghawdex*.

a nobleman of Palermo, was exiled to Gozo in 1491 (names lifted from Wettinger, 1990).

The famous Militia List of c. 1419/20, unearthed and subsequently analysed by Godfrey Wettinger, records the names of all able-bodied men who were bound to carry watch duties either in town or in the countryside. Unfortunately, the inhabitants of Gozo, like the *Castrum Maris* (at Birgu), are not included, as the sister island had its own defence set-up. Other surnames from Castilian times were then recorded in the *Angara* List (corvée roll) of ca. 1485 (Wettinger, 1968, pp. 25-48). It comprised a roster for compulsory work on the bastions of Mdina or some other unpaid public work of that nature. Regrettably, the roll again omits the names of the inhabitants of Gozo and Birgu.

It is appropriate to say something about medieval Jewry in Gozo. Trasselli's detailed calculations on the monetary impositions of 1492 (the year of its dissolution) have enabled him to calculate that Malta's Jewish community then had some 46/47 taxable households, while Gozo had 33 such households. The Jewish population in Gozo (on the basis of a multiplier of 5 or 6) must have, hence, ranged between 160 and 200 (Trasselli, 1956). Some of the names have survived: *Magister* Brachonus (Abraham) Safaradi of Gozo, a doctor (1446); Abram Buali (of Gozo) and his wife Husejna (1477); David Buali (of Gozo) and his wife Rahile (1487); Azar Cohen of Gozo (1487); and Seddach (or Sadich, Sedach, Sadoch) Ysachar of Gozo (ca. 1483–85).

All in all, the surnames of medieval Gozo were surprisingly different from those in Malta. For example, **Vella** hardly existed at all, whereas it constituted a full 3% of the surnames of Malta in c. 1419/20. **Zammit**, **Micallef**, **Zarb**, **Ellul**, **Caruana** and **Chilia** (cf. **Cilia**), among others, are barely discernible throughout the Middle Ages, whereas **Refalo**, **Mintuf** (cf. **Mintoff**), **Manuele** (cf. **Demanele**), **Rapa** and many others occur in Malta only when members of these families crossed from Gozo to the larger island (Wettinger, 1990, p. 58). A clear-cut dichotomy exists between Late Medieval Gozitan and Maltese surnames, with a limp bias towards non-Semitic surnames on the smaller island (Wettinger, 1980).

In the 15th and 16th centuries, Gozo had its own privileged group of local aristocrats and landed gentry. Most of the nobles were of foreign origin; they included the **Puntetremulo** (or **Pontremoli**), **La Barba**, **Navarro**, **Platamone**, **De Naso**, **De Federico**, **De Sahona** and **Mompalao** families. The landowners included the **Apap**, **Maira** (cf. **Amaira**), **De Anastasio** (cf. **Anastasi**), **Caxaro**, **De Bisconis**, **Saliba**, **Episcopo** (cf. **Piscopo**), **Mannara** (cf. **Manara**), **Sansone** and **Fantino** families (Wettinger, 1990, p. 56).

The Hospitallers arrived in Malta in 1530 accompanied by a substantial retinue of Rhodiote attendants. Some of these Rhodians seem to have settled in Gozo. Agius de Soldanis, for instance, mentions the **Anastasi** to this effect, while the surname **Nastasi** figures in the Gozitan *Crociata* Records of 1533.

These *Crociata* Records provide some 110 different surnames then current in Gozo. Out of these, some 59 are not found in the Maltese Militia List of ca. 1419/20 or the Maltese *Angara* List of ca. 1485. Consequently, the year 1533 possibly reveals the earliest record of surnames **Barun**, **Marino**, **Cremona**, **Madiona**, **Mercieca**, and **Ragonesi** (Wettinger, 1980, p. 178). The *Crociata* Records meticulously registered all those individuals who offered money for philanthropic purposes. Originally, such donations were meant to fund the holy crusades against the Muslims; hence the name.

The catastrophe of 1551 precipitated an almost complete break in Gozitan history. It constituted what historians call a full 'system collapse' as practically the whole population of the island, with the exception of a handful of decrepit men, was carried off into slavery, and surviving evidence shows that most of the captives ended their days in Constantinople or perhaps in other epicentres of the Turkish Empire. Only a few managed to escape or obtain their freedom, and fewer still ever returned to their homes. Members of the **De Apapis** (cf. **Apap**), **De Alagona**, **Castilietta**, **Navarra**, **Platamone** and **Pontremoli** families had the necessary funds to redeem themselves. Some of the names of ransomed captives as well as of others who languished in Ottoman lands are

known to us through subsequent notarial records and court proceedings (Bezzina, 2021, p. 131).²

One can safely deduce that the people represented by the surnames **Agueina, Aluisa, Calimera, Cainba, Gerardu, Giarda, Lazu, Lazarun, Marinara, Xaura, Xluc** and **Xucula** died in captivity as these family names, recorded before 1551, are never encountered again either in Gozo or in Malta (Fiorini, 1996, p. 78). It is hence understandable that most of the medieval surnames of Gozo have been wiped out. A comparison of the family names common on the island before 1551 with those in a list of Gozitan petitioners of 1664 shows that there is only a 20% overlap (Wettinger, 1990, p. 58).

Some of the redeemed slaves sought refuge in Malta, particularly in Valletta and the Three Cities, whereas others settled in Sicily, particularly in Trapani and Licata. Grand Master Juan D'Omedes and his Council initially entertained the idea of abandoning the island, but there seems to have been a semblance of a return to normality by 1553. Motivated by the chance of acquiring for free real estate abandoned by unransomed Gozitans, many Maltese and some Sicilians (e.g. **De Soltano** – cf. **Sultana, De Sciacca, Cuchinella, Carnemolla, Parascandalo**) began migrating to and repopulating the island. The vast majority of émigrés into Gozo, some 60%, came from just three main regions in Malta: (a) Naxxar, Mosta, Għargħur; (b) Żebbuġ, Siġġiewi; and (c) Żurrieq, Safi, Qrendi (Fiorini, 1996, p. 86).

In this manner, common Maltese surnames, which were totally absent from pre-1551 Gozo, have persisted on the island till the present day, as evidenced by intervening *Status Animarum* records. These include: **Agius, Attard, Azzopardi, Bezzina, Borg, Camilleri, Cassar, Ciantar, Cumbo, Debono, Frendo, Gatt, Grima, Mallia, Mangion, Muscat, Pace, Portelli, Psaila, Schembri, Scicluna, Spiteri** and **Xuereb** (Fiorini, 1996, p. 86).

In *The Earliest Church Register in Gozo: 1554–1628*, Horatio Vella collated a valuable set of

records relating to the vital statistics of the community which slowly re-emerged after the almost complete annihilation of that island's population in 1551. The codex registers the details of births/baptisms, confirmations, marriages and deaths, but, unfortunately the data for various years is incomplete (Vella, 2010, p. XIII).³ However, it offers a veritable reflection of the cognominal and genealogical make-up of Gozo's re-nascent people.

The commonest Gozitan surnames registered in the indicated period are: **Camilleri** (39 families: 68 children), **Vella** (33: 67), **Micallef** (29: 47), **Spiteri** (27: 52), **Agius** (25: 44), **Attard** (25: 49), **Borg** (21: 40), **Cassar** (19: 48), **Azzopardi** (19: 51), **Muscat** (19: 29), **Mizzi** (15: 26), **Mercieca** (15: 25), **Grima** (15: 25), and **Grech** (14: 33) (see Vella, 2010, pp. 55-64, 66). Some surnames in this codex, however, have since become extinct; these include: **Ballistreri, Cacarella, Calabrese, Cap, Chiaramonte, Colonia, D'Amore, Dandalona, De Giuseppe, De Nicolai, Farina, Mancus, Salabacco, Saragosa** and **Vagnolo** (Vella, 2010, p. 132).

The following are some other surnames from the second half of the sixteenth century. Joannes Maria Parascandalo, a Neapolitan, settled in Gozo in 1567 (Fiorini, 1996, p. 84). The Sicilian Petrus de Soltano settled in Gozo in 1569; this reference constitutes the earliest local record of the surname **Sultana** (Fiorini, 1986, p.73). Antonius Costa was curate at the Matrice, Gozo, in 1583.

Despite the steady inflow of fresh immigrants, it was only by the middle of the 17th century that the Gozitan population reached the level of 1551 once more (ca. five to six thousand). In 1637 the law obliging all Gozitans to pass the night within the Castello was repealed and, as explained by Joseph Bezzina (2021), the people began to abandon for good their cramped lodgings within the walls to more spacious abodes in Rabat and the countryside. Eventually, these settlements pressed for autonomy as these fast-growing communities were far from content with the fulfilment of their spiritual needs. Xewkija was established as a parish in 1678; Għarb

2 Donnus Nicolo Castelletti, the archpriest of the Matrice, died in Constantinople in 1553 (Bezzina, 2021, p.131). See the chapters 'The Half-baked Redemption Campaign' (Bezzina, 2021, pp. 125–131) and 'The Rebirth and Re-settlement of Gozo' (Bezzina, 2021, pp. 133–137), which are very much relevant to the subject under discussion

3 The codex is housed in the Bishop's Curia in Victoria, Gozo. It was commenced in 1554 by Rev. Leonardo Decace, the parish priest of the Matrix Church (Vella, 2010, p. xiii).

followed suit in 1679. When Xagħra, Sannat, Nadur and Żebbuġ earned the same status in 1688, the settlement pattern of Gozo was officially confirmed (Bezzina, 1988, pp. 391-393).

This *Status Animarum* (diocesan census), carried out by the local Church in 1687, was the most extensive diocesan census ever conducted up to that time. Unfortunately, it fails to register the people living in Gozo,⁴ Naxxar, and the Greek quarter of Valletta.

The French occupation of Malta was short-lived (1798-1800). These two years were characterised by the general disruption of the daily routine, followed by destitution, famine, and disease (Savona-Ventura, 1997, p. 32). The hostilities also precipitated a great influx of refugees from the cities into the countryside. This mass exodus deserves some attention as it constituted a major demographic shake-up. The French besieged in the Harbour area were obviously hard pressed and to safeguard their limited provisions opted to banish as many residents as possible. Up till November 1798, some 10,000 people had been compelled to leave. The rural Maltese, themselves in dire straits, could not possibly absorb such a sudden wave of internal migration. A decree dated 1 February 1799 ruled that all those expelled from that date onwards had to settle in Gozo and Comino (Catania, 1999, pp. 129-140). This essentially constituted the second major influx of Maltese migrants in the sister island after that following the debacle of 1551.

The Present Situation: an Overview

At present, Gozo (population ca. 39,000) consists of 14 distinct localities – just one town, Rabat, and 13 villages. According to Census 2005, the commonest surnames in Gozo are: **Vella** = 1, 492 (4.8%), **Attard** = 1,338 (4.3%), **Camilleri** = 1,187 (3.8%), **Grech** = 1,146 (3.7%) and **Portelli** = 966 (3.1%). The top-ten list is completed by **Buttigieg**, **Sultana**, **Azzopardi**, **Spiteri** and **Zammit**. The absence of **Borg** (the commonest family name in Malta) from the élite group is quite conspicuous – it actually occupies the 14th place and significantly features only in the Fontana top-five list. These

statistics also indicate that 19.7% of Gozo's total population shares just five surnames.

Gozo is a microcosm with its own peculiarities and unique distinguishing features. The genetic structure of Gozitans is mirrored in their surnames. Gozo, to a greater extent than Malta, has a very homogeneous population. For a long period of time there has been minimal exchange with the outside world, and until the immediate post-war period, the various villages in Gozo were isolated from each other. Most marriages occurred between members of the same village. This invariably led to a high degree of endogamy, particularly in the smaller villages. Cauchi (1998) is undoubtedly the first study to show the relationship between villages as gauged by an analysis of surnames.⁵ Some surnames (like **Vella** and **Attard**) are omnipresent and occur in high frequency all over the island. Others (like **Piscopo**, **Stellini** and **Cini**) are restricted to one or two villages, presumably indicating a founder effect with minimal dissemination. The study of surnames of a small island population such as that of Gozo could be of anthropological interest, and may shed light on genetic drifts within a community.⁶

According to Cauchi (1998), the commonest surnames of Gozo are to be found in most localities. **Vella**, in particular, features in the top-six list of all places with the exception of Xagħra. Some surnames are restricted largely to one or two particular localities (e.g., **Cini** in Żebbuġ; **Zerafa** in Ġħajnsielem; **Curmi**, **Debrincat** and **Parnis** in Munxar; **Refalo**, **Sultana** and **Bigeni** in Xagħra; **Camenzuli** in Ġħarb; **Meilaq**, **Falzon** and **Muscat** in Nadur; **Sacco**, **Bezzina** and **Sciicluna** in Rabat; **Dingli** in Xewkija; **Piscopo** in Ġħarb and San Lawrenz; **Cefai** in Qala and Żebbuġ).

The degree of homogeneity of the population in a locality may be indicated by the proportion of the population having a single surname. One surname may account for anything from 6% to 17% of the total village/town population. In the villages of Żebbuġ and San Lawrenz, the surnames **Cini** and **Grima** account respectively for 16.9% and 17.0%

4 During the period under discussion, six Gozitan churches had been designated parishes: Xewkija (1678), Ġħarb (1679), Nadur (1688), Sannat (1688), Xagħra (1688), and Żebbuġ (1688).

5 Cauchi (1998) based his population estimates on figures provided in the Government Gazette of 29/4/1997.

6 In Gozo, the number of double-barrelled surnames is quite small compared to mainland Malta.

of the population, whereas in Qala and Kerċem the surnames **Buttigieg** and **Grech** account respectively for 14.1% and 13.7% of the population (Cauchi, 1998, p. 22). The top six surnames in San Lawrenz, Żebbuġ and Qala comprise 55.11%, 54.02% and 45.42% of the respective populations, making them the most homogeneous localities in all Gozo. The least homogeneous localities are Rabat and Għasri where only 28.75% and 28.66% of their respective population is covered by the top six surnames (Cauchi, 1998).⁷

It is of some interest to determine the degree of sharing of the more common surnames by various localities in Gozo: **Buttigieg**, **Vella** and **Portelli** in Nadur and Qala; **Cauchi**, **Formosa** and **Vella** in Għarb and San Lawrenz; **Azzopardi**, **Vella** and **Xuereb** in Xewkija and Għajnsielem; **Vella**, **Camilleri** and **Zammit** in Rabat and Żebbuġ; **Attard**, **Grech** and **Vella** in Rabat and Għasri (Cauchi, 1998, p. 27). This presumably indicates a degree of intermixing occurring in the past between these localities. Some villages appear to be unique in that they do not share any common surnames to any great extent. Of these the most obvious ones are Fontana and Sannat.

It is quite plausible that a surname arises in one locality (founder effect) and spreads from there to various other areas in a radial fashion. One tentative and highly speculative explanation is as follows: **Portelli** and **Vella** arose in Nadur and spread to Qala, and from there to Għarb. **Buttigieg** probably started in Qala and migrated to Nadur, and hence to Għajnsielem. **Vella** and **Camilleri** link up Nadur with Rabat and thence to Żebbuġ. **Vella** and **Xerri** link up Qala with Xewkija (Cauchi, 1998, p. 47). Further evidence of such migration would be required to confirm these suggestions.

Surname Frequencies by Location

The 2005 Census supplies very helpful information about the aerial distribution of the five-commonest surnames in each Gozitan locality. The NSO has not yet released the relevant data covering the latest national enumeration (conducted in 2021), but it is likely that the results would not differ much.

The top-five surnames in Malta (**Borg**, **Camilleri**, **Vella**, **Farrugia**, and **Zammit**) are the same top-five surnames in the Maltese islands, exactly in the same order, meaning that the Gozo count did not influence the overall ranking order. The only two localities in Malta whose top-five surnames reflect the national pattern are Qormi and Swieqi, albeit following a different hierarchy. Not a single locality in Gozo falls in this category.

In some localities, the top-five rankings do not include a single surname in the national top-five hierarchy. These are Marsaxlok and Mdina in Malta; as well as Għajnsielem, Xagħra, and San Lawrenz in Gozo. The Gozo lists, in general, are more idiosyncratic. This is reflected in the preponderance of **Xuereb** at Għajnsielem, **Mintoff** at Għasri, **Debrincat** at Munxar, **Buttigieg** at Qala, **Sultana** at Xagħra, **Cini** at Żebbuġ, and **Grima** at San Lawrenz. These are all very small and relatively confined villages. One typical Gozitan surname seems to be **Rapa**, but is not frequent in sufficient numbers to make any of the top-five lists.

Vella is the third commonest surname in Malta. Its concentration in the northern part of Malta is supplemented by the fact that it is also the commonest surname in Gozo (4.8%), where it is particularly conspicuous at Xewkija (1st in ranking order), Rabat (2nd), Munxar (2nd), Sannat (2nd), and Kerċem (2nd). **Attard** is the top-ranking surname at Mdina. It is also the second commonest surname in Gozo, where it is most conspicuous at Fontana (1st), Xewkija (2nd), and Xagħra (2nd). **Azzopardi** is now the 12th commonest surname in Malta, maintaining a steady presence over just less than six centuries of history. In Gozo it is mainly concentrated at Għajnsielem, Għarb, and Xewkija. **Cassar** is one of the oldest surnames in Malta; it ranked eighth in the Militia List of ca. 1419/20. It has since climbed back to 11th place. It is now the top-ranking family name at Kalkara, Marsaskala, and Għarb (Gozo). Muscat tops the ranking order at Sannat (Gozo) and stands at second place in Mgarr (Malta).

The most conspicuous provenance surname in Malta is undoubtedly **Gauci**. It clearly derives from Arabic *al-Ġawdišī* 'Gozitan', 'a native of

⁷ While Rabat shares three common surnames with two villages (Għasri and Żebbuġ), the surnames involved are different, and only the ubiquitous Vella is shared between them (Cauchi, 1998, p. 27).

Locality	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Fontana	Attard	Borg	Grech	Galea	Mizzi
Għajnsielem	Xuereb	Grech	Azzopardi	Buttigieg	Grima
Għarb	Cassar	Cauchi	Vella	Micallef	Portelli
Għasri	Mintoff	Zammit	Saliba	Mizzi	Farrugia
Kerċem	Grech	Vella	Spiteri	Mercieca	Formosa
Munxar	Debrincat	Vella	Bajada	Said	Curmi
Nadur	Camilleri	Portelli	Muscat	Said	Buttigieg
Qala	Buttigieg	Portelli	Camilleri	Xerri	Vella
Rabat	Grech	Vella	Attard	Farrugia	Camilleri
San Lawrenz	Grima	Cauchi	Formosa	Cassar	Attard/Micallef
Sannat	Muscat	Vella	Spiteri	Buttigieg	Curmi
Xagħra	Sultana	Attard	Galea	Mercieca	Bajada
Xewkija	Vella	Attard	Azzopardi	Spiteri	Xuereb
Żebbuġ	Cini	Saliba	Vella	Zammit	Camilleri

Table showing the ranking of surnames in terms of frequencies by location.

Gozo' (Agius, 1996, p. 80); it is hence a medieval Latinised transcription of Maltese *Għawdx*. The strong showing of **Gauci** at Mellieħa and St Paul's Bay in the northernmost parts of Malta is hence quite understandable.

Family History

Which are the main sources available to family historians? Researching particular surnames may prove equally fascinating and frustrating, as records do not always yield the expected rewards.

a. Parochial Records

Religious records rank among the most promising sources for discovering dates, places and family relationships. In fact, in years before civil registration of vital statistics (which in Malta only started in 1863), religious or church records rank as the best available sources for birth, marriage and death information.

When Mons. Pietro Dusina arrived in Malta in 1575 for an apostolic visit, he not only gave parish priests instructions to keep proper registers in dutiful order but also left a specimen of each of these entries to be followed by all. Pope Paul V's decree *Rituale Romanorum* of 1615 obliged all parishes to keep five different records: the *Liber Baptizatorum* (for baptisms), the *Liber Confirmatorum* (for Confirmations), the *Liber Matrimoniorum* (for

marriages), the *Liber Mortuorum* (death) and *Liber Status Animarum*. The key motive behind the keeping of such records was obviously the spiritual overseeing of the flock. It was in 1554 that the Matrice or mother-church of Gozo started keeping such records.

b. The *Status Liberi* Documents

The *Status Liberi* documents were necessitated by the fact that every foreigner or returning immigrant intending to marry in Malta was compelled by local Church authorities to undergo a court procedure through which the plaintiff had to furnish verification of his free status. This meant that the applicant had to prove that he was not married, or else that he was a widower. The *raison d'être* for this procedure was to avoid polygamous relationships, especially by seamen and traders, whose job mobility and travels made it proverbially easier for them to have a woman in every port (Mercieca, 2006, p. 303).

c. The *Liber Status Animarum*

The *Liber Status Animarum* offer a veritable mine of information. These were lists of residents drawn annually by the *cappillani* as a means of checking whether their parishioners had confessed and received Holy Communion at Easter time. Already in 1575 Mgr Dusina had ordered local curates to compile such records, but it was only in 1614 that Paul V, by his constitution *Apostolicae Sedi*, prescribed it for the whole Roman Catholic Church. It is sometimes called the *ruollo*.

d. Other Sources

The National Archives (NAM), housed at Santo Spirito (Rabat Malta) since 1994, holds various sections that can be used for drawing up family histories, or to tracing information about one's ancestors. The Gozo Section of the National Archives (NAG) was inaugurated in 1989 at Victoria (Rabat). Probably its most treasured records are those of the *Universitas Gaudisi* (the medieval commune of Gozo) which date from 1560.

Due to Malta's history, and the important role which the Roman Catholic church has played in Maltese society, most records of a genealogical nature are owned by the Church. For records listing baptisms, marriages and deaths dating back to the 16th century one has to consult the repositories at the Curia Archives at Floriana (CEM), the Cathedral Museum Archives at Mdina (ACM), and obviously the aforementioned parochial registers of every town and village in Malta. The CEM not only holds copies of the already discussed *Status Animarum* and the *Status Liberi* indexes (SL, 1573–1896), but also keeps records of pastoral visitations, parochial annals and marriage records. Other marriage records are to be found in the Bishop's Archives of Gozo (AEG).

For the post-1863 period, the same type of records can be traced at the Public Registry Department (PRD) in Valletta. The Civil Status Section, housed at Old Treasury Street, Valletta, is responsible for the issuance of birth, marriage, and death certificates as well as of Free Status Certificates. For the purpose of surname research, the marriage acts are surely the most useful. The Marriage Registry was founded on 12 August 1975, the year in which the Marriage Act was ratified. The Act

regulates all marriages in the Maltese islands and also introduced civil marriages.

e. Genealogical Research

The Lanfrancos run a family business, *Genealogy Services – Malta*, offering genealogical research services to both local and overseas clients. Their story goes back several decades when Don Giancarlo Muscat of Żebbuġ (Malta) was seeking an efficient indexing system which could provide family links through the already existing parish records. He thus began the painstaking process of manually copying the tens of thousands of marriage acts found in the parishes of Malta and Gozo which date back to 1560. Today, the Lanfranco Archives are made up of over 400 volumes of reference books making it the largest collection of family history records in the Maltese islands. To facilitate matters, this vast and valuable *guliana* (genealogical records) is in the process of being computerised.

The National Library at Valletta then houses the **Adami Collection**. This is another *guliana* compiled by Dr Goffredo Adami and in all comprises 94 volumes, out of which 33 cover marriages for the period c. 1575–1818. As for Gozo, the **Giuliana Masini** is more relevant. It consists of 88 manuscript volumes of various sizes – enlists all the births, marriages, and deaths that took place in Gozo between 1554 and 1934. It also registers the births of Gozitans in Malta and sometimes, even abroad. The sources for the information are the parish records. The *Guliana* was initiated by Notary Felice Attard (1802-1874) and continued by his son Pietro Attard (1836-1916). It was eventually acquired by Francesco Masini LL.D (1894-1962). It is now curated by the National Archives of Malta.



The launching of the online version of the *Giuliana Masini* register - National Archive of Gozo, 2019.

f. Agius De Soldanis

The contribution of Gian Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis cannot be underestimated. His input in *Il Gozo antico e moderno, sacro e profano* (1746), more or less, follows G.F. Abela's approach in *Della Descrittione di Malta* (1647). He speaks of some illustrious Gozitan families – the **Apap**, the **Rapa**, the **Cassar**, and a host of others – and sheds light on a number of extinct casate such as *D'Avola*, *Bocchino*, *Bonafede*, *Caraffa*, *Pontremoli*, *Riggio*, *Soria*, *Vagnolo*, and *Vargas*. He rarely ventures into etymological matters. However, he does provide some valuable lists of family names: a register of jurats and governors who served in Gozo from 1530 to 1754, an inventory of extinct Gozitan surnames, and a roll of families who migrated to Sicily from Gozo and Malta in the early 16th century (Agius De Soldanis, 1746, Vol 1 pp. 96-124 and Vol 2 pp. 142-44).

The **Internet** has practically revolutionised research in every field, including genealogy. Some sites, such as *familyresearch.com*, *family.org* and *ancestry.com* run on commercial lines, others are accessible for free. Those relevant to Maltese genealogy include *Maltagenealogy* (including *Libro d'Oro di Melita*, managed by Charles Said Vassallo, resident in Australia), and *Malta Family History* (curated by Alan Keighley). Said Vassallo's site includes data mainly based on Charles A. Gauci's research on the local nobility conducted in the eighties and nineties. Keighley's, on the other hand, has valuable lists of mixed Maltese-English marriages (1801–1891) and electoral rolls from 1860 to 1920.

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